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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000461

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA/FO, SA/A, EB/OTP, EB/CBA, EB/BTA FOR
MBGOODMAN, EB/CIP/BA FOR BOB WATTS AND ROBERT BOEHME
TREASURY FOR PARAMESWARAN
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN, KAMEND
COMMERCE FOR AADLER
CENTCOM FOR CG CFC-A
USTR FOR GHICKS
TRANSPORTATION FOR DMODESITT
FAA FOR JHANCOCK AND TMARZIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/02/2016

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [ECPS](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: RUMORS OF AFGHAN CABINET SHUFFLE

REF: KABUL 0359

Classified By: Deputy Econ Couns Stevens for Reasons 1.4 b and d.

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) The Afghan government is swirling with rumors of an imminent cabinet shuffle and possible downsizing. Several ministries, including Commerce, Communications, Mines and Industry, and Transportation, anticipate management shakeups as it is widely expected President Karzai will reorganize his government in response to political pressures and a desire to put a fresh face on his government. Approval of cabinet ministers will set the tone for relations between the new Parliament and the Karzai government. End Summary.

2. (C) Commerce Minister Arsala is maneuvering for a more important job in the Karzai government. According to Ministry contacts, Arsala, who previously served as Finance Minister and Foreign Minister in the 1990s for the exiled Afghan opposition and Vice President in the transitional government, is seeking either a more important government ministry or the GOA's ambassadorship in the U.S. Econoff spoke to several Ministry contacts who all expressed frustration with Arsala's lack of interest in his own ministry and the resulting drift in setting a comprehensive Ministry agenda. (Note: Arsala spends most of his time in his presidential office at the Sadarat that he enjoys as a senior advisor to Karzai. End Note.)

3. (C) Communications Minister Sangeen is a well-respected technocrat who has overseen the private sector-driven expansion of the nascent Afghan telecommunications industry. His Ministry is one of the better managed in the GOA and has worked closely with private business to expand the country's telecommunications industry. However, Sangeen lacks an independent power base and Embassy contacts report that Vice President Massoud is seeking his ouster. (Septel will follow.) (Comment: Given his record of accomplishment, openness to free market competition and reputation for honesty, the Embassy is concerned that Sangeen's departure could harm one of the few on-going success stories in Afghanistan's reconstruction. End Comment.)

4. (C) Mines and Industry Minister Sediq, openly anticipating his own removal from office, recently approached USAID for a consulting job. Sediq does not have an extensive background in mining or energy extraction and has generally by-passed the ministry's permanent staff in his decision making. Econoff recently met with Deputy Minister for Mining Adel. Despite his position and almost thirty years experience at MMI, it was evident that Adel was totally cutoff from the Ministry's day-to-day operations and policy decisions. Adel openly criticized Sediq's management of MMI and suggested that the Minister would be looking for a new job in the coming weeks.

5. (C) Transportation Minister Qasimi may not survive the expected cabinet shuffle. (See reftel.) Embassy officers have recently noted erratic decisions and pronouncements by the Minister that may reflect partly on his eroding position. His last minute decision to make the Hajj pilgrimage this year may indicate that he does not expect to be Minister next year during Hajj. (Note: It is difficult to obtain a Hajj pilgrimage slot and as a minister, Qasimi is assured of a place and can make the pilgrimage at government expense. End Note.)

6. (SBU) Rural Rehabilitation and Development (RRD) Minister Atmar has been discussed for several months as a candidate to take over the Interior Ministry. However, more recent reports indicate he may remain in his current job, although his retention may depend in part on his success in attracting additional commitments from donors during the London Conference. Embassy contacts say that his Ministry may be

combined with the Ministry of Agriculture. RRD, one of the GOA,s better performing agencies, will reportedly dominate this new &super Ministry.⁸ No future role has been discussed for Agriculture Minister Ramin and he is expected to either become the new Deputy Minister for Agriculture or step down after the new cabinet is named.

17. (C) Foreign Minister Abdullah,s future is also open to discussion. There are reports that Karzai may reassign him to other diplomatic duties. Part of this speculation has been fueled by his peripatetic travel schedule which has rarely seen him in Kabul of late. Defense Minister Wardak may also change portfolios in a cabinet shuffle. During a lunch with Mrs. Cheney, Mrs. Wardak suggested that her husband had lost weight over concern that he was losing Karzai,s support in negotiations over the ultimate size of the ANA.

COMMENT

18. (C) Despite months of speculation, Karzai has deferred a cabinet reorganization until after the London Conference to avoid any perception of disunity or confusion in his government. Several members of Parliament have reported separately that the overall size of the cabinet will shrink from 26 ministries to as few as 19. It remains to be seen how the new Parliament will debate and ratify future cabinet selections. However, cabinet ratifications will provide Parliament with one of its first opportunities to formally criticize, support or hold accountable the Karzai government for its record in office. As always with Karzai,s personnel decisions, nothing is finally done until it is done. No matter how authoritative the gossip seems, we will have to wait for the announcement to know the shape of the new cabinet.

NORLAND